The Racial Divide in the United States:

A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015

A Pastoral Letter
by
His Excellency,
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville, Illinois

Text and Study-Guide

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY-GUIDE

This study-guide is designed to assist parishes, schools, study groups, Small Christian Communities, and others who wish to participate in serious discussions of Bishop Edward K. Braxton's "The Racial Divide in the United States: *A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015*." This study-guide should be seen as a flexible resource that can be adapted for use by large or small groups. While the guide is arranged for the participation of members of a group, it can also be used by two people or by an individual. It is for all who, with Christian faith, would like to examine the complex racial divide in our country that is documented in each day's headlines and the personal experiences of many people. The study-guide will aid you in creating an atmosphere of prayer, openness and mutual respect within which the Bishop's in depth presentation can contribute to honest sharing and specific actions to bridge the racial divide. The study-guide is arranged for six sessions corresponding to the six parts of the Bishop's "moving viewpoint." This makes it ideal for the six weeks of Lent. However, it could be used during any six-week period during the year. It can also be adapted for use in one, two, or three sessions. It is important to remember that the sections of the Pastoral Letter are a part of a whole. No one part can stand alone or out of context. Everyone who uses this study-guide should read the entire Pastoral Letter.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

- In using this study-guide, keep in mind that it is to be a faith-sharing process in an atmosphere of prayerful reflection.
- In order to be fruitful your goal must be a beneficial experience for all the participants. This will require mutual trust, honesty, genuine openness and a willingness to listen attentively to those whose points of view are different from your own.
- All participants should feel free to share as much or as little as they wish about the ideas raised by the Bishop. All must be made to feel comfortable and at ease, with no fear of being judged by others in the group.
- Even when individuals have very strong feelings about a point under discussion, effort should be made to speak about these emotions and feelings in a way that is not confrontational or belittling of others.
- Silence is a vital part of the total process. Participants should be given time to reflect before the conversations begin.
- One participant should not dominate the conversation. After you speak, let others respond or share their points of view before you speak again.
- The conversation is diminished if you sit quietly and never speak. Every effort should be made to make sure that the atmosphere is not marked by intimidation. If someone does not speak, it may be helpful to recall that the faith sharing is enhanced when all participate.
- It must be understood from the outset that your dialogues are taking place within a circle of confidentiality. No one should repeat or report anything that is shared in the group. If this spirit of confidentiality is not maintained, participants will hesitate to speak honestly. Some may simply stop attending the sessions.
- Ideally, these prayerful conversations should lead to specific actions by individuals or by the group. These actions may be very modest in nature. Or, they may be more significant community-wide activities.

SESSION FORMAT FOR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE PASTORAL LETTER

All participants should receive copies of the study-guide prior to the first gathering in order to be prepared for each session. The Sacred Scripture and a lit candle should be on a table covered with an attractive cloth. Live or recorded music and soft lighting may be used to create an atmosphere of relaxation and welcome as people arrive.

The time frame should have a duration of about 90 minutes. A suggested flexible format would be: Gathering (10 minutes); Opening Prayer (5 minutes); Sharing (20 minutes); Reflection and Discussion (25 minutes); Think and Act (15 minutes); and Sending Forth (15 minutes).

The Racial Divide in the United States: A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015

By
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville, Illinois
January 1, 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

(1) May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, fill your hearts throughout the New Year! As the Catholic Church celebrates the World Day of Peace today, I am pleased to share this Reflection with you. Please be generous with your time so that you can read it carefully. I invite you to reflect on its contents, pray about its concerns, and discuss its challenges with your sisters and brothers in Christ.

This Reflection has a moving viewpoint in six parts.

I. PROLOGUE
(This is an invitation to imagine the country and the Church from a different perspective.)

II. A NEW AWARENESS OF THE RACIAL DIVIDE AND A CALL TO CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE
(Our Christmas faith emboldens us to enter this conversation.)

III. TRAYVON MARTIN, OSCAR GRANT, JOHN CRAWFORD III, MICHAEL BROWN, JR., ERIC GARNER, AND TAMIR RICE
(This is a summary of the known facts about the deaths of six African-American males and the international protests that followed.)

IV. WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD
(This is an invitation to reflect upon these events within the context of the Church's teachings and actions concerning the racial divide in America.)

V. ARE THERE REALLY "MINORITY" AMERICANS AND "MINORITY" CATHOLICS?
(This is an expansion of the dialogue that examines the negative impact of expressions such as "minorities" and "minority groups.")

VI. CONCLUSION: PRAY, LISTEN, LEARN, THINK, AND ACT
(This section provides specific suggestions of activities that may help bridge the racial divide.)

Part I

PROLOGUE

GATHERING

At the first meeting the group leader reviews the study-guide guidelines. The leader invites all participants to introduce themselves briefly. This will be especially important if this is a newly-formed group and the members do not know one another. A few moments of informal sharing at the beginning provides an opportunity to "break the ice" and help establish the proper atmosphere, in the manner of a "Small Christian Community."

OPENING PRAYER

The leader of the session calls the community together in prayer. The lit candle is a reminder that Christ, the Light of the World, is present by the power of the Holy Spirit who imparts the gift of wisdom. If convenient, music may precede or follow the prayer.

SHARING

A prologue is a literary device that often serves as an introduction to a longer text. It may serve as a summary of the author's primary concerns. A prologue may present themes and questions that will be raised in the text. It may also be used to create a mood or feeling in the reader that in some way prepares the reader to be more open to the challenging idea presented in the longer narrative. When a prologue invites the reader to participate in a "role reversal" experience, it obviously should not be taken literally. It is a call for the reader to enter into an exercise of imagination.

Part I, Prologue, *should have been read in advance. If time allows and it seems appropriate, a participant may read it to the group or it may be reviewed in silence. Once it is clear that all have read it, the suggested questions below can be used to initiate the conversation.*

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What was your initial reaction to the prologue **(2-7)**? How does it prepare you for the rest of the Letter?
- Why do you think the Bishop invites this "role reversal?" What does God "look like" to you?
- How would you feel if none of the images of the sacred in your parish church looked like you **(5-6)**?
- Why do you think some African-American people think of the Catholic Church as a "White racist institution?"
- Since angels (divine messengers) are pure spirits with no bodies and no gender, why do you think they have been pictured as fair skinned, fair haired creatures with wings and flowing robes **(6-7)**?
- Why do you think that the Catholic Church continues to build churches and decorate them with essentially European art even in India and Africa **(7)**?
- Why do you think religious art often uses "white" as a symbol of "good" and "black" as a symbol of "evil" **(6)**?
- What do you think is the meaning of the last sentences of the prologue? ["I really don't think this is ever going to happen." "Why not?" you ask. "Why not **(7)**?"]

THINK AND ACT

- Does the prologue prompt you to consider doing or saying anything different in your personal life, your family, your place of work, your parish and the larger community?

SENDING FORTH

The leader of the session invites the community to close with prayer. After a brief pause, everyone is invited to offer prayers for the needs of those gathered, the needs of the Church, and for the grace to build bridges across the racial divide. The prayer may conclude with the Our Father and the sharing of the Peace of Christ.

PART II

Prepare for the next session by carefully reading and reflecting on Part II *of the Pastoral Letter.*

I. PROLOGUE

(2) I would like to begin by asking you to do something rather unusual. It requires you to use your imagination in order to enter into the role reversal presented in the narrative that follows. The narrative portrays an imagined Catholic Church in the United States in which most American Catholics are People of Color and White Catholics are members of a very small "minority group."

(3) Imagine yourself as a White American teenager living in a poor urban area with few opportunities for you to get a good education and find meaningful employment. Imagine that some of your friends are trouble makers and when the African-American police come around they often intimidate them. This frightens you because another White friend of yours was shot and killed by African-American police when he reached into his pocket for his wallet which they thought was a gun. Since you were very young, your parents have cautioned you to avoid contact with the police because they may suspect you of wrongdoing.

(4) You and your friends, whose families are struggling to make ends meet, live near the neighborhood Catholic Church. You have never been inside the church. You and your family are not members of the Catholic Church, which some of your relatives call a "Black racist institution" which traditionally has not shown much interest in inviting White people to join the parish. You and your friends feel that a church that promises the joy of eternal life after you die while offering little to help in your daily struggles is not very meaningful. You feel you need a church that will be at your side, engaged in the struggle, helping you find a God of the oppressed and an angel of freedom and justice. You need a church that embraces, celebrates and is informed by the "White experience." If God is to really be God for you, He must be God the liberator, who uproots injustice and oppression by His mighty power. A God of the status quo is dead.

(5) Now imagine that an African-American acquaintance, sensing that you are discouraged, persuades you to go with him to this very church, St. Charles Lwanga, for Mass. You enter the church and all images of the sacred are in Afro-centric art. All images of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and all the saints are as People of Color (African, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American). God the Father Himself is painted on the ceiling of the church as a distinguished older Black gentleman. You think to yourself, "God the Father is absolute spirit. He has no race or nationality, or anatomical gender. Scripture never describes Him as an elderly, African-looking, brown skinned man." You wonder if the Catholic Church believes that only people of African ancestry are in heaven.

(6) You notice that even the angels in the church have African features. If angels have no bodies and no gender, if they are pure spirits, why are they not represented in all races? Just think of the impact it would have on un-churched White people, like you, if they encountered the image of a magnificent White angel with blond hair and blue eyes when they entered a Catholic Church. You also notice that in the Catholic Church "Black" symbolizes everything that is "good" and "holy" whereas "White" symbolizes evil and sin. The images of Satan, the devil, and demons in the church are all White. Later, you search art books and cannot find one image of Satan painted in dark hues. He is always depicted in light, pale colors.

(7) You ask your African-American acquaintance, "Wouldn't the Catholic Church be more truly universal and welcoming of all if the holy men and women of the Bible were pictured as people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds? After all, though we know they were Jewish, no one knows what they actually looked like. All Semitic people do not look like western Europeans." He responds, "That question has been asked before and the response has usually been people who are White should realize that the Afro-centric art represents them as well. Afro-centric art is universal. The all-Black religious art is there for historical reasons. Even though a few churches have added a White saint here and there, for the most part the few White Catholics we have in the church have simply accepted the fact that the majority of churches have few or no images of the citizens of Heaven who look like them. You ask your acquaintance, "Does the Catholic Church intend to perpetuate this all-Black image of Heaven in the churches of the future?" Your African-American acquaintance replies, "There are a few churches in big cities with a large number of 'minorities' where they have painted White angels and saints. But some of the older White people don't like it. They say they do not believe God looks like them. In many countries where all of the people are European, the people almost never complain about the all-African religious art." "But," you ask, "what about here in the racially diverse United States? What a powerful statement the Church would make if she mandated all future churches to have racially diverse images of God, Jesus, Mary, saints, and angels? Wouldn't it convey a more authentically universal image of heaven?" Your African-American acquaintance answers, "I think I understand the point you are trying to make. But, I really don't think that is ever going to happen." "Why not?" you ask. "Why not?"

Part II

A New Awareness of the Racial Divide and a cALL to Christian Dialogue

Gathering

If needed, the group leader reviews the guidelines and invites all participants to introduce themselves briefly. This will be especially important if this is a newly-formed group and the members do not know one another. A few moments of informal sharing at the beginning provides an opportunity to "break the ice" and help establish the proper atmosphere, in the manner of a "Small Christian Community."

Opening Prayer

The leader of the session calls the community together in prayer. The lit candle is a reminder that Christ, the Light of the World, is present by the power of the Holy Spirit who imparts the gift of wisdom. If convenient, music may precede or follow the prayer.

Sharing

Part II, A New Awareness of the Racial Divide and a Call to Christian Dialogue, *should have been read in advance. If time allows and it seems appropriate, a participant may read it to the group or it may be reviewed in silence. Once it is clear that all have read it, the suggested questions below can be used to initiate the conversation.*

Reflection and Discussion

- Part II begins with a statement about forms of "psychological slavery" that are born in part from the European slave trade **(8)**. How much do you know about the history of human slavery in this country? Do you know what the "Middle Passage" is? Do you know how many African people perished in the so-called slave trade?
- Were you aware of how few African-Americans are Catholics **(9)**?
- How attentive have you been to "painful breaking news" and the "great gulf" that constitutes the racial divide **(8, 10)**?
- The heart of Part II is a list of ten observations about which Bishop Braxton hopes there is some degree of agreement **(12,** 1-10**)**. Discuss these points. Note especially 10**.** How much agreement or disagreement about them exists in your group?
- In **13** the Pastoral Letter describes a variety of reactions to the deaths of young African-American men in "conflict situations" with White authority figures and the subsequent peaceful protests and violent demonstrations. Which reaction best fits you?
- Bishop Braxton concludes Part II with very brief descriptions of two personal experiences **(14-16)**. The media have made a great deal of these few sentences. Some have wanted all of the details of when and where these events occurred. Why do you think there was such interest in his personal experiences?
- Should he have left these examples out or provided more details?
- Share any personal experiences you have had that are relevant to the topics in Part II.
- What do you think the Bishop means by "Christmas faith" **(17)**?

Think and Act

- Do the ideas in Part II and your conversation prompt you to consider doing or saying anything different in your personal life, your family, your place of work, your parish, the larger community?

Sending Forth

The leader of the session invites the community to close with prayer. After a brief pause, everyone is invited to offer prayers for the needs of those gathered, the needs of the Church, and for the grace to build bridges across the racial divide. The prayer may conclude with the Our Father and the sharing of the Peace of Christ.

Part III

Prepare for the next session by carefully reading and reflecting on Part III *of the Pastoral Letter.*

II. A New Awareness of the Racial Divide and a Call to Christian Dialogue

(8) Our Holy Father, Pope Francis has selected the theme "No Longer Slaves, But Brothers and Sisters" for the 2015 World Day of Peace celebration. Human slavery can take many forms, including the literal enslavement of human beings by other human beings which, sadly, continues to exist in our world today. There are also forms of social, emotional and psychological slavery: slavery to prejudice, racism, bias, anger, frustration, rage, violence, and bitterness in the face of systemic injustices. Regrettably, these forms of slavery endure in the United States and they are born from the tragedy of the European "slave trade" that captured innocent human beings from West Africa and brought them to the United States to be "sold," "bought," and "owned" in bondage to work on the lucrative plantations in southern states. Long after the cruel evil of slavery was ended, its consequences continued to cast a shadow over our nation as a racial divide. Recent dramatic eruptions of racial conflict have made this shadow more apparent. Painful "breaking news" accounts call all Americans to rededicate themselves to the work of peace and reconciliation among our citizens of different races; ethnic origins; and social, cultural, educational, economic, and religious backgrounds. As Catholics, as members of the Body of Christ, the Church, this is more than a call; it is our vocation, born of baptism.

(9) Our World Day of Peace celebration always comes during the season of joy, between Christmas and the Epiphany, the showing forth of the glory of Christ to the nations. The radical source of this joy is the tremendous mystery that the Word of God is made flesh in Christ Jesus. Christ, the Prince of Peace, announces the dignity and worth of every man, woman, and child. In a number of communities in the United States, the spirit of community fellowship, good will, and optimism that accompany Christmas and the New Year have been overshadowed by dramatic and disturbing events that have reminded the nation and the world of the racial divide that endures in our country. While many African-American people live in southern Illinois, most of them are not members of the Catholic Church. When I am on Parish Pastoral Visitations, I occasionally see a small number of African-Americans and a smaller number of African people in the congregations. The only predominately African-American parish in the Diocese is St. Augustine of Hippo in East St. Louis. This should not be surprising since of the roughly 78,000,000 Catholics in this country, only about 3,500,000 are African-Americans. Many members of the Church may have only infrequent and somewhat superficial contact with Catholics of a different racial background.

(10) During the past few months, Catholics, like the rest of the country, have pondered distressing events in cities around the country. These events include the deaths of young Men of Color during confrontations with local White police officers or a neighborhood watch person; the public expressions of grief by family members; the reactions to grand jury decisions to indict or not to indict the persons who shot these men; unprecedented unrest (including not only peaceful demonstrations, but also the taunting of the police, violence, the senseless destruction of property, and heinous "revenge" murders) in cities across the country; statements by President Obama, governors, and mayors about the current racial crisis; investigations of possible civil rights violations initiated by the Attorney General, Eric H. Holder, Jr.; and published surveys and media commentaries suggesting that a great gulf exists between the way many Black Americans and many White Americans view these events. This gulf is, in fact, a racial divide.

(11) It is my hope that this World Day of Peace Reflection will help families, parishioners, neighbors, support groups for priests, ecumenical ministerial groups, Chancery staff members, and school faculties to engage in fruitful conversations about the events that are unfolding in the United States. It would be particularly valuable if people of different racial backgrounds could partake in the same conversations. There are surely some Catholics who would rather not have these conversations. But our Christmas faith in Christ, the redeemer of all people, urges us to overcome our hesitation. Now that the busy Christmas season has passed, this Reflection could serve as a resource for discussions marking January 15th, the 86th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the New Year, Lent, which begins early, on February 18, 2015, would be a very appropriate opportunity to give time and serious consideration to the topics addressed here.

(12) Let's begin with ten observations about which I hope there will be some degree of agreement.

1. Each of the accounts of encounters between White police (or a neighborhood watch person) and young Men of Color ending in death is a unique event. While there are some obvious similarities, they are completely distinct and the people involved are all unique individuals about whom we should not generalize or stereotype.

2. We each realize that our views about these complex events are influenced by our age, education, family background,

personal experiences, religious beliefs, and the media, which may make difficult situations worse if their reporting is sensational and/or biased.

3. The deaths of the individuals who lost their lives in these incidents are sad events; a source of grief and sorrow for their families. It is also true that the experiences of the men who caused these deaths are a source of sorrow for them and for their families.

4. None of us knows, with certainty, exactly what happened in these and other incidents because we were not there. None of us has a full and complete knowledge of all grand jury proceedings. Even when grand jury documents have been released, it is not the same as experiencing the manner in which the cases were presented. Perhaps only God and the people involved know exactly what happened. Unfortunately, in each case, a key participant is dead. Most of our information is derived from various forms of media, which have their distinct points of view.

5. The work of police officers is very difficult and very dangerous. Because of the violence in American society, they leave their homes each day not knowing if they will return unharmed. They deserve our respect and gratitude. They are forced to make split-second, life and death decisions on which their lives and the lives of others depend. In some communities, many police officers are faithful Christians, who strive to live by the Gospel. Every community needs dedicated police officers to keep order and to protect the citizens and their property. Most police are fair-minded and respect the human dignity and worth of all citizens. Some, however, are not. There is credible evidence that bias and prejudice influence the attitudes and actions of some police officers, no matter what their race or nationality may be. Significantly, 57% of African-American police believe Black offenders are treated with far less respect by White officers than White offenders. However, only 5% of White officers agree that this is true. It is a fact that some young Black men commit crimes requiring their arrest by the police. However, this should not lead to the demonization of all Black men as dangerous, violent criminals. It is a fact that some White police officers use excessive force and display racial prejudice when they interact with Black men suspected of crimes. However, this should not lead to the demonization of all White police officers as racists ready to kill Black men at the slightest provocation.

6. Some individuals firmly believe that it is completely inappropriate for religious leaders to make any comments about these events beyond generalized statements about working for peace and justice; while others firmly believe that the Gospel compels religious leaders to address such issues forthrightly in spite of their complexity in a constructive spirit of mutual respect and reconciliation.

7. In some communities, African-American males are taking the lives of other African-American males in alarming numbers. Several investigations suggest that 93% of African-Americans who are murdered are murdered by other African-Americans and 84% of White Americans who are murdered are murdered by other White Americans.

8. All American citizens have the right to protest peacefully and demonstrate when they believe that they are faced with unjust laws, unresponsive government officials, and morally unacceptable social structures that do not respect the dignity and worth of every human person.

9. No one has the right to break the law by expressing frustration with violence, arson, looting, destruction of property, and endangering the lives of fellow citizens. These inexcusable crimes only undermine the efforts of those with legitimate grievances.

10. Most American neighborhoods are made up of people of similar racial, economic, and cultural backgrounds. This is also true of most American church congregations. Most American Catholic parishes have very few or no African-American members. Significantly, more and more Americans of different races work, socialize, and recreate together and the number of biracial marriages continues to increase. However, the majority of Americans do not have significant numbers of intimate friends of different races whose homes they visit, with whom they vacation, and with whom they share their most personal feelings.

(13) Catholic people, like other Americans, have reacted in a variety of ways to these deaths, court decisions, and protests.

a) For some, the events are simply another fleeting news item that has no direct impact on them. The participants are not their friends or family members. It is not their neighborhood.

b) For others, these are disturbing events and they are concerned about their impact on the nation; but they do not dwell on them.
c) For still others, there are feelings of anger and frustration about the cries of "White racism," the criticism of the police, the attack on the judicial system, the disruption of normal life by protesters, and the destruction of property by vandals. As one Catholic expressed it to me, "Slavery and racism are things of the past. The protesters should stop complaining, obey the law, follow the orders of the police, get a job, and get on with their lives."
d) But, there are still other Catholics who are profoundly distressed. They feel that they were naivë in thinking the era of racial conflict was behind us. They are upset by the attitudes and comments of some of their Catholic neighbors.
e) Some of these individuals, concluding that there is systemic racial prejudice in American society that is morally wrong, have taken to the streets taking part in the mass nationwide peaceful protests while condemning the acts of vandalism.

(14) Before we continue, let me add a personal note. I am not a completely impartial outside observer in the face of these events. I have had two personal experiences with law enforcement officers that made me very conscious of the fact that simply by being me, I could be the cause of suspicion and concern without doing anything wrong. The first experience was when I was a young Priest. The second was when I was already a Bishop. In both cases I was not in clerical attire. I was dressed informally.

(15) In the first experience, I was simply walking down a street in an apparently all-White neighborhood. A police car drove up beside me and the officer asked, "What are you doing in this area? Do you live around here? Where is your car? You should not be wandering around neighborhoods where you do not live." I never told him I was a Catholic Priest, but I wondered what it was I was doing to attract the attention of the officer? This was long before I heard the expression, "walking while Black."

(16) In the second experience, I was driving in my car in an apparently all-White neighborhood with two small chairs in the back seat and a table in the partially open trunk tied with a rope. A police car with flashing lights pulled me over. The officer asked, "Where are you going with that table and those chairs? Before I could answer, he asked, "Where did you get them? Then he said, "We had a call about a suspicious person driving through the area with possibly stolen furniture in his trunk." I wondered what I was doing to make someone suspicious. Many years would pass before I would hear the expression "racial profiling."

(17) As we examine the racial divide, we may be tempted to yield to the seeming pessimism of Reinhold Niebuhr. He suggested in "Moral Man and Immoral Society" that while some individuals (Moral Man) might frequently strive for and sometime attain the ability to perform altruistic acts of compassion and love; larger communities (Immoral Society) are generally slow to be moved to generous acts of love, compassion and reconciliation. Our Christmas faith emboldens us to believe that we, as individuals and as communities, can and should cross the racial divide.

Part III

TRAYVON MARTIN, OSCAR GRANT, JOHN CRAWFORD III, MICHAEL BROWN, JR., ERIC GARNER, AND TAMIR RICE

GATHERING

If needed, the group leader reviews the guidelines and invites all participants to introduce themselves briefly. This will be especially important if this is a newly-formed group and the members do not know one another. A few moments of informal sharing at the beginning provides an opportunity to "break the ice" and help establish the proper atmosphere, in the manner of a "Small Christian Community."

OPENING PRAYER

The leader of the session calls the community together in prayer. The lit candle is a reminder that Christ, the Light of the World is present by the power of the Holy Spirit who imparts the gift of wisdom. If convenient, music may precede or follow the prayer.

SHARING

Part III, Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, John Crawford III, Michael Brown, Jr., Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice, *should have been read in advance. If time allows and it seems appropriate, a participant may read it to the group or it may be reviewed in silence. Once it is clear that all have read it, the suggested questions below can be used to initiate the conversation.*

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How do you feel about the election of America's first bi-racial president **(18)**?
- When they occurred, how much attention did you pay to the six incidents summarized in this part of the Bishop's Pastoral Letter **(19-46)**?
- What similarities or differences do you see in the six accounts?
- Are you aware of additional similar incidents?
- Do you see a connection between **12,** 5 in Part II and these events?
- Is it possible, in your opinion, for a person who did witness the entire episode to determine the innocence or guilt of the person who died or the innocence or guilt of the person who caused the death?
- What is your ordinary source of information about these sad events?
- Do you think the "news" provides fair and unbiased coverage of these stories?
- Why do you think that many African-Americans and many White Americans hold opposing views about who is innocent and who is guilty?
- What do you think about the appropriateness of peaceful protests and violent demonstrations **(12,** 8-9, **20, 22, 32, 40, 41, 45, 46)**?
- How much do you know about the grand jury system? What is your reaction to grand jury decisions in these cases **(19, 31, 32, 33, 40)**?
- What impact did the events described in **36, 37, 47** have on your thinking about the racial divide?

THINK AND ACT

- Do the ideas in Part III and your conversation prompt you to consider doing or saying anything different in your personal life, your family, your parish, your place of work, or the larger community?

SENDING FORTH

The leader of the session invites the community to close with prayer. After a brief pause, everyone is invited to offer prayers for the needs of those gathered, the needs of the Church, and for the grace to build bridges across the racial divide. The prayer may conclude with the Our Father and the sharing of the Peace of Christ.

PART IV

Prepare for the next session by carefully reading and reflecting on Part IV *of the Pastoral Letter.*

III. TRAYVON MARTIN, OSCAR GRANT, JOHN CRAWFORD III, MICHAEL BROWN, JR., ERIC GARNER, AND TAMIR RICE

"God gave Noah the rainbow sign.
No more warnings, the fire next time!"
— from a slave song

(**18)** Undercurrents of the racial divide in the United States have been apparent to all serious observers of events from the time of the Civil Rights Movement, spearheaded by the prophetic, non-violent work of the assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to the present. There have been a number of commentators who, at least until recently, have erroneously suggested that the election of a bi-racial American, Barack Obama, as President ushered in a post-racial era in America. Born to Stanley Ann Dunham (of English and German heritage) and her husband Baraka -later -Barack Obama, Sr. (of Kenyan heritage), the President, at times, seems to embody the racial divide in his own person. Because he embodies the reality of Harvard pioneer, W.E.B. Du Bois' "The Souls of Black Folk," to some African-Americans, Mr. Obama does not speak forthrightly enough about racial prejudice in America. To some White Americans, Mr. Obama sees racism everywhere and never stops talking about it. The President is presiding over events in which the misperception of a post-racial era has been shattered by a series of events dealing with encounters between young African-American males, White representatives of law enforcement, the judicial system, and the responses of the larger Black and White communities. It is important for you to have the main points of these events before you to facilitate your conversations. While the accounts that follow are drawn completely from public records, it is impossible for them to be complete and absolutely balanced accounts. They are not provided to provoke argument about who was right and who was wrong. They are provided to give common narratives and to provide the context for discussions, since the issues before us cannot be fruitfully discussed in the abstract. They are provided to help us learn and move forward.

(19) On February 26, 2012, **Mr. Trayvon Martin** was shot and killed in Sanford, Florida by George Zimmerman, a White neighborhood watch volunteer (NOT a police officer), who told the police he looked suspicious. The police told him not to pursue Mr. Martin on foot. However, he did. There was an altercation between the two men and Mr. Martin, who did not have a gun, was shot to death by Mr. Zimmerman. No charges were filed against Mr. Zimmerman by the police who stated they found no evidence to refute Mr. Zimmerman's claim that since Mr. Martin was attacking him, he shot in self-defense. The "stand your ground law" in Florida does not allow the police to arrest or charge someone in these circumstances. There were no eye witnesses. Later, Mr. Zimmerman was formally charged with second degree murder in a hearsay affidavit filed by special prosecutor Ms. Angela Corey. Many commentators argued that the prosecution would have had a better chance of succeeding if the case had been presented to a grand jury considering a lesser charge. In July 2013, he was acquitted on grounds of self-defense in a jury trial.

(20) After the death of Mr. Martin, there were protest marches and rallies across the nation. The 2012 Presidential campaign was eclipsed by the media coverage surrounding these events, which were followed by a short-lived national debate concerning "stand your ground laws" and "racial profiling."

(21) During the same year of Mr. Zimmerman's acquittal (2013), the film *Fruitvale Station*, documenting the case of **Mr. Oscar Grant III**, was released to critical acclaim. On New Year's Day 2009, Mr. Grant, who was unarmed, was shot and killed by Johannes Mehserle, a Bay Area Rapid Transit Officer in Oakland, California. Mr. Grant, along with a number of other passengers, was detained by police at the train's Fruitvale Station when they responded to a call saying there was a fight on one of the rapid transit trains. Mr. Grant, who was resisting arrest and lying face down, was being restrained by Officer Mehserle. The officer stood and said: "Get back, I'm gonna Tase him." The officer drew his pistol and shot Mr. Grant once in the back. Mr. Grant shouted, "You shot me!" Mr. Grant died the next morning. This episode was recorded by several bystanders on cell phone cameras and digital videos. Millions of people viewed the incident, which spread quickly via websites and social media.

(22) In 2010, the county prosecutors charged Officer Mehserle with murder for the shooting. He resigned his position and pleaded not guilty. Mr. Mehserle's criminal defense attorney argued that Mr. Mehserle shot Mr. Grant with his pistol by mistake. When he saw Mr. Grant reach for his waistband, he intended to use his Taser. The jury found Mr. Mehserle guilty of involuntary manslaughter and not guilty of second-degree murder and voluntary manslaughter. At first, there were peaceful protests against the ruling. By nightfall, nearly 80 people had been arrested because of violent protests, arson, destruction of property, and looting.

(23) On November 5, 2010, Mr. Mehserle was sentenced to two years, minus time served. He was released on May 3, 2011 and is now on parole. In 2010, the U.S. Justice Department opened a civil rights investigation against Mr. Mehserle. However, so far, no charges have been filed. In 2011, the Bay Area Rapid Transit settled a wrongful death claim with Mr. Grant's family for $2.8 million.

(24) Most recently, there have been the cases of John Crawford III, Michael Brown, Jr., Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice, among others.

(25) On August 5, 2014, **Mr. John Crawford III**, a 22 year old African-American was shopping in a Walmart store near Dayton, Ohio. He picked up a toy gun, an unpackaged BB/pellet air rifle in the toy section of the store. Another shopper who saw him walking through the store with the gun called 911 saying "a Black man" was carrying a rifle in the store. The caller later conceded that, "At no point did he (Mr. Crawford) shoulder the rifle and point it at somebody."

(26) The two White officers of the Beavercreek Police who arrived at the store said Mr. Crawford did not respond to their directives to put the gun down and lie on the floor. Instead, he seemed to try to escape. Officer Sean Williams thought the toy was a real gun. He shot Mr. Crawford twice and he died on the scene. The security camera recorded the incident. When he was shot, Mr. Crawford was talking on his phone. The gun was in his left hand. When the police questioned his girlfriend, they did not believe her when she stated that Mr. Crawford did not bring the toy gun into the store with him. Officer Williams was placed on desk duty. A grand jury decided not to indict the officers involved.

(27) Mr. Crawford's family has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Walmart and the Beavercreek Police Department. In order to prevent future catastrophic events, Alicia Reece, an Ohio State Representative has proposed a "John Crawford's Law," which would require toy guns to look like toy guns.

(28) On August 9, 2014, **Mr. Michael Brown, Jr**., 18, who was unarmed, was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson who said he did so to save his own life from the threat of Mr. Brown who was moving aggressively towards him. Mr. Brown's body lay in the street for hours after the shooting. On the night of November 24, after months of deliberation, St. Louis County Prosecutor, Mr. Robert McCulloch, announced that the grand jury, having reviewed all of the evidence, decided "not to indict Officer Wilson."

(29) Officer Wilson, in his patrol car, saw Mr. Brown and a friend walking down the middle of the street. He directed them to move off the street to the sidewalk. They did not comply. As Officer Wilson drove past them, he noticed that Mr. Brown looked like the person suspected of stealing cigars from a convenience store and assaulting the salesperson. A struggle took place between Officer Wilson and Mr. Brown through the police car window. In the course of the conflict, the officer's gun was fired twice. Mr. Brown was wounded in the arm. When the officer testified before the grand jury, he said that when he (6 foot 4 inches, 210 pounds) was trying to restrain Mr. Brown (6 foot 4 inches, 292 pounds) during this altercation, he "felt like a 5-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan."

(30) The officer pursued Mr. Brown on foot. The analysis of blood stains on the street indicates that Mr. Brown, who had been shot a number of times, continued to move toward Officer Wilson. The policeman fired at least six shots. The fatal shot was a head wound. Officer Wilson said the race of Mr. Brown did not matter. He only shot him because he had to. Some witnesses said this was not true. This entire encounter between the officer and the unarmed teenager lasted less than ninety seconds. Feeling that some Ferguson residents and the media were judging Officer Wilson prematurely, a number of White residents organized expressions of support, raising funds for his defense.

(31) There is no video of the event. A number of witnesses stated that Mr. Brown had his hands up in a position of surrender resulting in the later mantra, "Hands up! Don't shoot!" After months of deliberation, the grand jury announced that Officer Wilson would not be indicted. Several examinations of the secret grand jury documents, which were made public, concluded that there were many problems in the witnesses' testimonies. There were statements that were "inconsistent, fabricated, or provably wrong." Some witnesses even admitted that they changed their testimony for various reasons. Commentators noted that the jury's refusal to indict Officer Wilson marked the fifth time that Mr. McCulloch had presented evidence to a grand jury in prosecuting a policeman involved in a shooting. In all five cases, there was no indictment. A number of observers said Mr. McCulloch should have been replaced by a special prosecutor because of his close relationship with police and because his father, a policeman, was killed in the line of duty.

(32) Once the grand jury decision was made public, protests and demonstrations erupted in Ferguson and more than 150 other cities, including St. Louis, Philadelphia, Seattle, Albuquerque, New York, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Oakland, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Portland, Chicago, and Boston. In Ferguson, some demonstrations turned violent and destructive. Businesses were destroyed by arsonists, cars were burned, and merchandise was stolen from shops. There were indications that much of the violence and destruction was instigated by outside agitators. Governor Jay Nixon declared a State of Emergency and called out the National Guard. President Obama said that he understood the disappointment and anger of those who staged peaceful protests. However, he had no sympathy for those who destroyed property because these were criminal acts.

(33) Archbishop Robert J. Carlson of St. Louis was a visible presence in Ferguson participating in a prayer service for peace and reconciliation along with other clergy on the night of the grand jury's decision. He stated, "With the grand jury decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson, I know that many feel hurt, betrayed, forgotten, and powerless. I know anger, disappointment, and resentment, and fear abound in our community. But, we must accept this decision as the proper functioning of our justice system. In our collective desire for justice, we can be blinded by the poisonous desire for vengeance, which can be contagious and bring a desire for violence. We all want justice, so we should respect the integrity of our system of justice as something that aims for the common good."

(34) Father Robert Rosebrough, Pastor of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Parish, moved about the community after the violence and destruction visiting with employees now out of work. People lamented the fact that the lack of economic opportunity in poor communities had been a major concern after Mr. Brown's death. Now, senseless vandalism has deprived the area of places of employment so needed by residents.

(35) Mr. Holder, the Attorney General, was critical of Mr. McCulloch's presentation of the grand jury's findings. He expressed concern about the wisdom of the late at night announcement, which could have contributed to the unrest that followed. The director of the Harvard Criminal Justice Institute at Harvard University, Ronald S. Sullivan Jr., said the case was "the most unusual marshaling of a grand jury's resources I've seen in my 25 years as a lawyer and scholar." However, Mr. Rudy Giuliani, former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, said that the prosecution could have never convicted Officer Wilson at a trial and that the grand jury made the right decision not to indict him. He said, "If you can't prove probable cause, how are you going to prove it beyond a reasonable doubt when the witnesses are contradicting themselves?"

(36) Obviously, all instances in which a White police officer shoots an African-American male are not marked by questions and ambiguities that may warrant peaceful protests. On December 23rd, an unnamed White Berkley, Missouri police officer shot and killed Antonio Martin, 18, an African-American male. The video of the event and eye witness testimony indicate that police arrived at a gas station where there had been a report of shoplifting. The officers recognized two men who fit the description of the alleged shoplifters. The officers exited their police car and engaged them in conversation. The surveillance video of the event shows Mr. Martin walking away from the officers several times. Then Mr. Martin pulls a gun from his pocket and points it toward the officer. The officer fires several shots and appears to stumble as he backs away. Mr. Martin died shortly afterwards.

(37) This is certainly a sad event because a young man's life has been ended and his family is in mourning. However, in this case, there seems to be no evidence to suggest questionable or possibly overly aggressive conduct by the officer. He did what he was compelled to do, namely to defend his life and the lives of others in the face of a person pointing a gun directly at him. A small number of protesters gathered shortly after this incident comparing the death of Mr. Martin to the death of Mr. Brown in nearby Ferguson. A physical fight broke out and some of those involved were arrested. Unfortunately, instances in which members of the community have a credible reason for peacefully protesting what may be inappropriate conduct by the police will be significantly undermined if protests take place even when the police are acting properly in difficult circumstances with regretful deadly results.

(38) On July 17, 2014, **Mr. Eric Garner**, 44, who did not have a weapon, died in Staten Island, New York, after Police Officer Daniel Pantaleo put him in what has been described as a chokehold, a tactic banned by the New York Police Department. The event was recorded on cell phones and spread rapidly via the Internet. The police suspected Mr. Garner was selling single cigarettes from packs without tax stamps, called "loosies." He had multiple prior arrests for this and other violations including assault and grand larceny. He was out on bail. Mr. Garner said that he was not selling cigarettes and told the police they should stop harassing him. When the officers were attempting to arrest him,

Mr. Garner backed away. Officer Pantaleo approached him from behind and put his arms around Mr. Garner's neck, applying what has been widely regarded as a chokehold by those who have viewed the video recording. The officers subdued him on the sidewalk with his face down. Mr. Garner, a married man with six children, said over and over again, "I can't breathe." He was taken to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead. Though he had been accused of selling loose cigarettes in the past, none were found at the scene.

(39) The city medical examiners determined that the cause of Mr. Garner's death was neck compression from the apparent chokehold, along with "the compression of his chest and prone positioning during physical restraint by police." His asthma, heart disease, and obesity contributed to his death, according to the medical examiner. After this incident, Officer Pantaleo and another policeman were transferred to desk duty and Officer Pantaleo was required to turn over his badge and his service revolver. He was the subject of two civil rights lawsuits in 2013 where plaintiffs accused him of falsely arresting them and abusing them. In one of the cases, Officer Pantaleo and other officers ordered two African-American men to strip naked on a public street in order to be searched. The charges against both men were dismissed.

(40) Many people thought the video was self-evident. This led to a widespread expectation in some parts of the New York community and beyond that Officer Pantaleo would be indicted by the grand jury. However, on December 3, 2014, the Staten Island grand jury announced its decision not to indict him. This announcement resulted in large demonstrations (including die-ins), rallies, and protests in different parts of New York as well as in Boston, Washington DC, Chicago, Oakland, Atlanta, and in Europe. These protests were organized quickly via social media. Many of the participants were young Americans of noticeably different races and different social and cultural backgrounds. They condemned racial bias and police brutality chanting "Black Lives matter!" "Hands up! Don't shoot!" and "I can't breathe!"

(41) The protests were largely non-violent. Nevertheless, many arrests were made of those who would not disperse. At the University of California in Berkeley, protests turned violent. There was extensive damage to businesses and many were arrested. Some of these demonstrations have now been going on for weeks and they have been covered by media from around the world. The Attorney General announced that the Justice Department would conduct a civil rights investigation that would be "independent, thorough, fair, and expeditious." Officer Pantaleo later spoke about the incident saying that his action was not a "chokehold." It was a standard "takedown maneuver" for someone noncompliant that he learned in the police academy. He did not intend to harm Mr. Garner. Nor did he put pressure on his throat or windpipe. Skeptics rejected his statement indicating that the medical examiner's report, which ruled the death a homicide, was clear.

(42) On November 22, 2014, just days before the December 3 grand jury ruling in the case of Mr. Garner, **Mr. Tamir Rice**, 12, was shot in Cleveland, Ohio by Police Officer Timothy Loehmann after a report that he had been seen brandishing a gun in a local park. The gun was, in fact, a toy airsoft (plastic pellet) gun, that resembled a real gun. The boy died the next day. The 911 caller said the gun was "probably fake." Apparently, Officer Loehmann and Officer Frank Garmback, who responded to the call, did not receive this information. According to the officers, there was a very brief encounter during which Mr. Rice reached towards his waistband. However, within two seconds of arriving on the scene, Officer Loehmann fired two shots. One report stated that Mr. Rice did not threaten or point the airsoft gun at the policemen. Yet another report states that he was asked to put down the gun and he did not. How it happened that the officers were not given the information that the gun was "probably fake" has not been explained.

(43) After this incident, reports surfaced that Officer Loehmann had been deemed an emotionally unstable recruit and unfit for duty in his previous position as a member of the Independence, Ohio police force. Again, a very sad story became national and international news.

(44) A grainy surveillance video of the shooting, without audio, shows Mr. Rice pacing around the park, occasionally holding up a gun in his hand, talking on his cell phone, and sitting at a table in a gazebo. The video shows the officers' patrol car pulling up beside the gazebo. Mr. Rice then appears to move his right hand toward his waist. According to published reports, Officer Loehmann exited his car and shot him immediately.

(45) On November 24, Cleveland officials announced that a grand jury would hear the case and determine whether charges will be filed against either policeman. Meanwhile, the officers are on administrative leave. Mr. Rice's family urged those who have mounted demonstrations and protests to do so peacefully. "Again, we ask for the community to

remain calm. Please protest peacefully and responsibly." They have since filed a wrongful death law suit. On December 12, 2014, the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner ruled the death was a homicide.

(46) By mid-December, growing national and international protests intensified. On Thursday, December 11, 2014, Members of Congress, staffers and other Capitol Hill employees stood silently on the House steps and raised their hands in the air to protest the killing of unarmed African-American men by police. Athletes demonstrated their solidarity in a variety of ways. On Friday, December 12, 2014, the Church commemorated the apparition of the Mother of Jesus to St. Juan Diego, an Aztec. Her features were like those of the natives, brown skin and dark hair. She is patroness of the Americas as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Significantly, on that same day, people engaged in non-violent protests by the thousands in major cities in a national day of resistance. In New York, more than 25,000 marched expressing outrage that the grand jury did not indict any officers in the death of Mr. Eric Garner. In Washington, D.C., more than 5,000 marched down the Capitol Mall calling for an end to the use of deadly force by White Police in dealing with unarmed Black men. The cases cited here and many others like them are unique. But, many people have begun to view them collectively because of similar elements: unarmed African-American males killed by White police (with the exception of Mr. Zimmerman), no judgment of guilt and no punishment (with the exception of former officer Mehserle), and the perception that racial bias contributed to the deaths of these African-American males.

(47) Near the end of December, a tragic situation was made far worse. On December 20, Mr. Ismaaiyl Brinsley, 28, a troubled, mentally unstable African-American, with a criminal record, shot his former girlfriend in Baltimore and then traveled to New York City armed with a gun and harboring intentions to attack police officers. He walked up to a marked squad car on a Brooklyn street and opened fire at the two police officers inside, **Officer Wenjian Liu**, 32, and his partner, **Officer Rafael Ramos**, 40. One witness said Mr. Brinsley "took a shooting stance on the passenger side and fired his weapon several times through the front passenger window, striking both officers in the head." He then killed himself. Officer Liu, who had been married for only two months, was Chinese-American, and Officer Ramos, who was married with two children, was Hispanic-American. Mr. Brinsley reportedly made "very anti-police" statements and expressed the desire to revenge the deaths of Mr. Michael Brown, Jr. and Mr. Eric Garner. Through a spokesperson, Mr. Garner's family expressed outrage on hearing of the murders of the two officers. "Any use of the names of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, in connection with any violence or killing of police, is reprehensible and against the pursuit of justice in both cases." This horrific, senseless crime has resulted in unspeakable suffering for the families involved and heightened the growing tensions in New York, especially when some protesters rejected Mayor William De Blasio's request to discontinue their demonstrations until after the funerals for the slain police officers.

(48) A growing awareness seems to be emerging that renewed efforts must be made to re-establish bonds of trust and respect between law enforcement, the judicial system, and local communities. There has been a call for greater racial diversity in local police departments. Body cameras have been proposed to provide more accurate records of deadly encounters. Law enforcement personnel have acknowledged the need for better training in responding to situations which can escalate quickly to violence and death. Some young men may be becoming more aware of the importance of complying promptly with police instructions, even if they seem unfair or unjust. Religious leaders are appreciating the urgent need for them to take a more active role in bridging the racial divide especially between young African-American men and White representatives of the law.

Part IV

WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD

GATHERING

If needed, the group leader reviews the guidelines and invites all participants to introduce themselves briefly. This will be especially important if this is a newly-formed group and the members do not know one another. A few moments of informal sharing at the beginning provides an opportunity to "break the ice" and help establish the proper atmosphere, in the manner of a "Small Christian Community."

OPENING PRAYER

The leader of the session calls the community together in prayer. The lit candle is a reminder that Christ, the Light of the World is present by the power of the Holy Spirit who imparts the gift of wisdom. If convenient, music may precede or follow the prayer.

SHARING

Part IV, What We have Seen And Heard, *should have been read in advance. If time allows and it seems appropriate, a participant may read it to the group or it may be reviewed in silence. Once it is clear that all have read it, the suggested questions below can be used to initiate the conversation.*

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What does the Harlem Renaissance poet, Langston Hughes, mean by a "dream deferred"?
- How much do you know about the history of the European and American slave trade?
- Some commentators have suggested that slavery has had a greater impact on People of Color than the Holocaust has had on Jewish people. Do you agree?
- Were you surprised to read the Catholic Church (bishops, religious orders, institutions) "owned" enslaved human beings **(50)**? Did you know that the Church did not oppose slavery or the Jim Crow laws that followed the Emancipation Proclamation **(50)**?
- How do you think slave holding Catholics reconciled this practice with the Gospel of Jesus Christ **(50)**?
- Did you know that "Colored People" were excluded from Catholic seminaries and convents within the life time of people alive today **(51)**? What do you think Bishop Joseph Francis meant by his words quoted by Bishop Braxton **(51)**?
- What positive steps has the Church made to overcome its flawed legacy regarding racial justice **(52, 53)**?
- Have you personally experienced or observed Catholic racial prejudice?
- Before reading Bishop Braxton's Pastoral Letter, had you heard of or read any part of "Brothers and Sisters to Us" (1979) and "What We have Seen and Heard" (1984)?
- Which of the quoted passages from these landmark documents speaks most effectively to our current climate of racial tension **(55-68)**?

THINK AND ACT

- Do the ideas in Part IV and your conversation prompt you to consider doing or saying anything different in your personal life, your family, your parish, your place of work, or the larger community?

SENDING FORTH

The leader of the session invites the community to close with prayer. After a brief pause, everyone is invited to offer prayers for the needs of those gathered, the needs of the Church, and for the grace to build bridges across the racial divide. The prayer may conclude with the Our Father and the sharing of the Peace of Christ.

PART V

Prepare for the next session by carefully reading and reflecting on Part V *of the Pastoral Letter.*

IV. What We Have Seen And Heard

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore -
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over -
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

— Langston Hughes

(49) In the face of the racial tensions that have emerged in the wake of these deaths and other events, Catholic Bishops such as Archbishop Robert Carlson of St. Louis have called for renewed efforts to overcome racial injustice, while urging those who exercise their right to protest to do so in a manner that respects the safety of other citizens and the rule of law.

(50) On this World Day of Peace 2015, as we ponder the Bishop of Rome's reminder that we are no longer slaves but brothers and sisters, we are forced to acknowledge that by her own admission, the Catholic Church in the United States has a flawed history in the area of racial equality. Many young students of history are surprised, even shocked, to learn that Catholic institutions and religious communities "owned" human beings from west Africa as enslaved workers on their plantations. They are amazed that the Catholic Bishops did not forcefully condemn human bondage as contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is difficult for them to believe that some Catholic authors wrote tracts in defense of the slave trade and that the Church did not vigorously oppose apartheid-like Jim Crow laws in the south.

(51) It is news to them that Men and Women of Color were excluded from seminaries and convents and generally could not become priests or sisters, except in orders designated for "colored people." It is a revelation to them to learn that when Bishop Joseph A. Francis, S.V.D., late Auxiliary Bishop of Newark, New Jersey was asked why there were so few African-American Catholics, his response was, "If you had seen and heard what I have seen and heard, you would not be amazed that there are so few, you would be amazed that there are so many."

(52) These same young students are often equally surprised at the efforts that many in the Church have made to move beyond this painful, flawed legacy. A number of Catholic priests and sisters were active in the Civil Rights Movement working and marching for racial integration in the north and south. Catholic schools in urban communities have made important educational contributions to the intellectual and moral formation of African-American youths, many of whom were not Catholics. The Church has also been at the forefront of programs that confront the sources of poverty which is a fact of life for many African-American families. In 1958, the American Bishops published "Discrimination and Christian Conscience" and in 1968 they published "National Race Crisis." But most honest students of history would acknowledge that these documents, though well intended, were not widely disseminated or implemented. Catholic parishes and schools, north and south, remained largely segregated. And many Church practices that reinforced racial bias remained largely unchanged.

(53) Eleven years later in 1979 and then in 1984 two landmark pastoral letters of seminal importance appeared. The first was the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document, "Brothers and Sisters to Us," which bluntly condemned racism as a sin and heresy present in the Church. The second was "What We Have Seen and Heard," the 1984 pastoral statement of the then ten African-American Catholic Bishops, who were all Auxiliary Bishops at the time. (Both documents are available online and from the Bishops' Conference.) These pivotal texts made a significant impact in certain parts of the country. However, there are parishes and dioceses where they were all but ignored. Many American Catholics today do not even know these documents exist. Reading (or rereading) these historic texts would be an excellent resource for entering the current urgently needed conversation. Here are several key excerpts.

(54) While the statistics in "Brothers and Sisters to Us" (1979) are no longer current, much of the content is as current as this morning's news. Important passages from this historic document are presented below.

(55) "Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part, it is only external appearances which have changed. In 1958, we spoke out against the blatant forms of racism that divided people through discriminatory laws and enforced segregation. We pointed out the moral evil that denied human persons their dignity as children of God and their God-given rights. A decade later in a second pastoral letter we again underscored the continuing scandal of racism and called for decisive action to eradicate it from our society. We recognize and applaud the readiness of many Americans to make new strides forward in reducing and eliminating prejudice against minorities (*sic*). We are convinced that the majority of Americans realize that racial discrimination is both unjust and unworthy of this nation."

(56) "With respect to family life, we recognize that decades of denied access to opportunities have been for minority (*sic*) families a crushing burden. Racial discrimination has only exacerbated the harmful relationship between poverty and family instability."

(57) "Racism is only too apparent in housing patterns in our major cities and suburbs. Witness the deterioration of inner cities and the segregation of many suburban areas by means of unjust practices of social steering and blockbusting."

(58) "Today in our country men, women, and children are being denied opportunities for full participation and advancement in our society because of their race. The educational, legal, and financial systems, along with other structures and sectors of our society, impede people's progress and narrow their access because they are Black, Hispanic, Native American or Asian."

(59) "The structures of our society are subtly racist, for these structures reflect the values which society upholds. They are geared to the success of the majority and the failure of the minority (*sic*). Members of both groups give unwitting approval by accepting things as they are. Perhaps no single individual is to blame. The sinfulness is often anonymous but nonetheless real. The sin is social in nature in that each of us, in varying degrees, is responsible. All of us in some measure are accomplices."

(60) "Discrimination belies both our civil and religious traditions. The United States of America rests on a constitutional heritage that recognizes the equality, dignity, and inalienable rights of all its citizens. Further, we are heirs of a religious teaching which proclaims that all men and women, as children of God, are brothers and sisters. Every form of discrimination against individuals and groups--whether because of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, economic status, or national or cultural origin--is a serious injustice, which has severely weakened our social fabric and deprived our country of the unique contributions of many of our citizens. While cognizant of these broader concerns, we wish to draw attention here to the particular form of discrimination that is based on race."

(61) "Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you." Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation."

(62) "What We Have Seen and Heard" (1984) is a one of a kind document in which African-American Catholics spoke for the first time with a common voice when the Bishops declared:

(63) "Central to any discussion of the Black family today is the question of the Black man as husband, father, co-provider and co-protector. For many historical reasons, the Black man has been forced to bear the crushing blows of racial hate and economic repression. Too often barred from access to decent employment, too often stripped of his dignity and manhood, and too often forced into a stereotype that was a caricature of his manhood, the Black male finds himself depreciated and relegated to the margins of family life and influence."

(64) "Black people know what freedom is because we remember the dehumanizing force of slavery, racist prejudice and oppression. No one can understand so well the meaning of the proclamation that Christ has set us free than those who have experienced the denial of freedom. For us, therefore, freedom is a cherished gift. For its preservation, no sacrifice is too great."

(65) "Hence, freedom brings responsibility. It must never be abused, equated with license nor taken for granted. Freedom is God's gift, and we are accountable to Him for our loss of it. And we are accountable for the gift of freedom in the lives of others. We oppose all oppression and all injustice, for unless *all* are free *none* are free. Moreover, oppression by some means freedom's destruction for both the oppressor and the oppressed, and liberation liberates the oppressor and the oppressed."

(66) "Our African-American ancestors knew the liberating hand of God. Even before emancipation they knew the inner spiritual freedom that comes from Jesus. Even under slavery they found ways to celebrate that spiritual freedom which God alone can give. They left us the lesson that without spiritual freedom we cannot fight for that broader freedom which is the right of all who are brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the gift we have to share with the whole Church. This is the responsibility that freedom brings: to teach others its value and work to see that its benefits are denied to none."

(67) "On the other hand, we are in a position to counter the assumption which many have advanced that to become a Catholic is to abandon one's racial heritage and one's people! The Catholic Church is not a "White Church" or a "Euro-American Church." It is essentially universal and, hence, Catholic. The Black presence within the Catholic Church in America is a precious witness to the universal character of Catholicism."

(68) "The historical roots of Black America and those of Catholic America are intimately intertwined. Now is the time for us who are Black Americans and Black Catholics to reclaim our roots and to shoulder the responsibilities of being both Black and Catholic. The responsibility is both to our own people and to our own Church. To the former, we owe the witness of our Faith in Christ and in His Body, the Church. To the latter, we owe this witness of faith as well as the unstinting labor to denounce racism."

(69) Hopefully, your conversations about the Church's past actions and statements will help you to put the current challenges we are facing in a larger historical context of Catholic teaching and actions addressing the racial divide in our land. Perhaps there is no urgent need for the Church to make more statements. The urgent need may be to live by the statements the Church has already made. Personally appropriating and acting on these clear teachings of the Pastors of the Church will assist you in changing "World Day of Peace" from a slogan into a reality.

Part V

ARE THERE REALLY "MINORITY" AMERICANS AND "MINORITY" CATHOLICS?

GATHERING

If needed, the group leader reviews the guidelines and invites all participants to introduce themselves briefly. This will be especially important if this is a newly-formed group and the members do not know one another. A few moments of informal sharing at the beginning provides an opportunity to "break the ice" and help establish the proper atmosphere, in the manner of a "Small Christian Community."

OPENING PRAYER

The leader of the session calls the community together in prayer. The lit candle is a reminder that Christ, the Light of the World is present by the power of the Holy Spirit who imparts the gift of wisdom. If convenient, music may precede or follow the prayer.

SHARING

Part V, Are there really "Minority" Americans and "Minority" Catholics? *should have been read in advance. If time allows and it seems appropriate, a participant may read it to the group or it may be reviewed in silence. Once it is clear that all have read it, the suggested questions below can be used to initiate the conversation.*

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What is the relevance of John Donne's words "No man is an island" to the overall message of Bishop Braxton's reflection?
- Who do you think of when you hear that there will be a television program on "minorities in America?" People whose ancestors came to this country from Sweden? Why not? They are, after all, a small "minority" of the population.
- What is his goal in questioning the use of terms "minorities" and "minority groups" which are widely used in American society and in the Church?
- Are not these terms necessary in order to argue in favor of "affirmative action" **(71)**?
- Are ALL American citizens REALLY equally Americans **(72, 73, 74)**?
- Is there a relationship between "White privilege" and thinking of one's group as "the majority"?
- Do you refer to Christians of other traditions as "non-Catholics" **(75)**? Why?
- Does the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, advance the Good News of Jesus by referring to some of her members as "minorities" **(77, 78)**?
- Are you personally willing to stop speaking of fellow Americans and fellow Catholics as "minorities" and strive to speak of people as who they are, rather than as who they are not?

THINK AND ACT

- Do the ideas in Part V and your conversation prompt you to consider doing or saying anything differently in your personal life, your family, your parish, your place of work, or the larger community?

SENDING FORTH

The leader of the session invites the community to close with prayer. After a brief pause, everyone is invited to offer prayers for the needs of those gathered, the needs of the Church, and for the grace to build bridges across the racial divide. The prayer may conclude with the Our Father and the sharing of the Peace of Christ.

PART VI

Prepare for the next session by carefully reading and reflecting on Part VI *of the Pastoral Letter.*

V. ARE THERE REALLY "MINORITY" AMERICANS AND "MINORITY" CATHOLICS?

"No man is an island, entire of itself.
Every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less.
Any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls.
It tolls for thee."

— John Donne, Anglican priest and poet

(70) The work of realizing the World Day of Peace 2015 vision that we are sisters and brothers no longer enslaved by sin, including the sins of racism and vengefulness, can be impeded, to some degree, by the very language we use. In many of the uneasy conversations and commentaries about what the country has been experiencing since attention has been focused on the deadly encounters between unarmed African-American men and the law enforcement and the judicial system, the expressions "minority groups," "minorities," and "minority communities" have been widely used. You see them even in the selections cited from "Brothers and Sisters to Us." I believe that your prayerful discussions of the contents of this Reflection on the Racial Divide would be broadened and deepened by examining and questioning the validity of these commonly used expressions. Are there really "minority" Americans and "minority" Catholics? Though these expressions are regularly used in government and Church documents, they are radically incorrect and they exacerbate the sometimes difficult relationships between people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The reasons why these expressions are questionable become apparent after a careful consideration of what it actually means to be an American and what it means to be a Catholic. In the end, these expressions contribute to and underscore the racial divide in our country and in the Church.

(71) Beginning in the 1960s the media, the federal government, and Americans of certain racial and ethnic backgrounds (especially People of Color, Hispanics, and Asians, though significantly, not every ethnic group which constitutes a statistically small portion of the population) began to speak more and more of "minorities" and "minority groups" in solidarity with women and other groups who have experienced injustice based upon discrimination. These designations were used to help formulate the argument that, in order to redress the grave injustices caused by systemic prejudices, special consideration should be given to members of these groups in matters related to education, employment, housing, financial assistance, professional advancement and business contracts. Few fair-minded people will argue that longstanding practices of discrimination have made it impossible for certain groups of Americans to have equal access to the American dream. Without prejudice to the validity of these important concerns, the case can be made that the common use of the word "minorities" as the collective designation of these groups of people perpetuates negative stereotypes and is contradicted by what it means to be an American citizen.

(72) It does not take a particularly critical analysis to recognize the fact that words like "minorities" and "minority groups" are used selectively and are not applied consistently in reference to all groups of Americans who are a statistically small percentage of the population. Americans whose ancestors came from Luxemburg, for example, do not constitute a major portion of the population. But they are never referred to as minorities. Why not? At times, these expressions seem to be used as code words with subtle negative connotations (poor, uneducated, unemployed, broken family structures). They also beg the question: Who among the American citizens are the "majority" group? There are no "*ethnic"* Americans in the same sense that one might speak of *"ethnic"* Japanese in Japan, for example. There is no single ethnic, racial or cultural group that constitutes "true" Americans. Every citizen of the United States is fully and equally an American in the exact same sense of the word. Citizens who are descendants of passengers on the Mayflower are not, somehow, more truly Americans than descendants of "passengers" of slave ships, or the most recent immigrants from Iran, or the Native Americans granted citizenship by Congress in 1924. If they are citizens, they are Americans, precisely because there are no *ethnic* Americans. A careful reflection on the meaning of the expression, *E Pluribus Unum* ("one from many"), excludes the possibility of designating "minorities" in this country, unless <u>all</u> citizens are so designated.

(73) Obviously, this truth has not been fully accepted by all sectors of American society (including some Catholics) in the past or in the present. European-Americans, with roots in Ireland or Italy, for example, were once ostracized in this

country as “immigrants,” “foreigners” and “undesirable minorities.” The same was true of Jewish people. But why are they generally not considered minorities today? The answer is not because any one of these groups now constitutes the statistical majority of the population of the United States. As Matthew Frye Jacobson’s “Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race” notes the process of gathering together those Americans whose ancestors were from various European countries with very little in common and making them the “majority” group and relegating everyone else as “minorities” is, historically, a rather recent and arbitrary development.

(74) It is a development which, at certain junctures, excluded even European-Americans of certain backgrounds as despicable *ethnic* minorities. In its present usage, the term “minority groups” often connotes the haves vs. the have-nots, the powerful vs. the powerless, the assimilated vs. the non-assimilated, because they have not assimilated middle-class mores and the cultural heritage of Western Europe. As a result, even when the majority of the residents in a city are African-Americans or Hispanic-Americans, they are still “minorities.”

(75) It is obvious that the federal government, the media, the justice system, educational institutions and the Catholic Church in the United States cannot be effective in their work without being aware of the complex ethnic, racial and cultural diversity that makes up the population of this country. However, an awareness of this diversity must never lead these institutions to the uncritical acceptance or even unwitting perpetuation of terms like “minorities” and “minority groups,” which are rarely neutral and which may contradict what it means to be an American by inviting stereotypes and reinforcing prejudices. No one likes to be designated by what they are NOT. Today, many Protestant Christians appreciate it when Catholics no longer refer to them as what they are not, “non-Catholics.” They prefer being referred to as what they are, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Episcopalians, or Christians of other traditions. No one ever calls a Catholic a “non-Presbyterian.”

(76) An important step across the racial divide would be taken by acknowledging that *all* Americans are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and that *no* group constitutes the *majority.* Indeed, many serious anthropological studies suggest that, in spite of their sociological prominence, ethnicity and race are very problematic categories. Frequent references to groups of Americans and groups of Catholics as “minorities” seem to designate them as who they supposedly are not. They are not a part of an arbitrary grouping of Americans of certain ethnic groups (those of European ancestry) who have been arbitrarily joined together and designated as “the majority.” Significantly, the majority of the world’s population is not of European origin and current demographic trends indicate that in the decades ahead Americans of European heritage may become a statistical “minority” of the country’s overall population.

(77) The Catholic Church, faithful to Scripture, teaches that in Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female, neither north nor south, east nor west. All are redeemed sinners transformed by Christ as members of His “mystical Body” with equal dignity before God. It would be a step in the right direction if the Catholic Church, other religious groups, and the media were to lead the way in eliminating, or at least challenging, expressions like “minorities” and “minority groups.” This is more than a matter of “political correctness.” Words, as conveyers of meaning, have great power for good or evil. Is it asking too much for a nation that proclaims itself to be “one from many” to affirm that, in truth, there are no majority/minority groups in this country because we really are *one*? We are simply Americans, proud of our amazingly diverse backgrounds, with every right to expect, even demand, to be treated with equal dignity by law enforcement, by the courts, in the public square and in our churches.

(78) This is not the first time this question has been raised. Yet, both secular and religious documents and publications continue to speak of certain people (and ONLY certain people) as “minorities” and “minority groups.” If you and more and more people come to see that such expressions are only helping to maintain the racial divide, and if you and others cease using them, you will be contributing to the reconciliation and harmony envisioned by the World Day of Peace. It is to this reconciliation that the star of Bethlehem has called the whole human family year after year.

Part VI

Conclusion: Pray, Listen, Learn, Think and Act

Gathering

If needed, the group leader reviews the guidelines and invites all participants to introduce themselves briefly. This will be especially important if this is a newly-formed group and the members do not know one another. A few moments of informal sharing at the beginning provides an opportunity to "break the ice" and help establish the proper atmosphere, in the manner of a "Small Christian Community."

Opening Prayer

The leader of the session calls the community together in prayer. The lit candle is a reminder that Christ, the Light of the World is present by the power of the Holy Spirit who imparts the gift of wisdom. If convenient, music may precede or follow the prayer.

Sharing

Part VI, Conclusion: Pray, Listen, Learn, Think and Act, *should have been read in advance. If time allows and it seems appropriate, a participant may read it to the group or it may be reviewed in silence. Once it is clear that all have read it, the suggested questions below can be used to initiate the conversation.*

Reflection and Discussion

- How has your participation in the conversations about Bishop Braxton's Pastoral Letter helped you to decrease the tensions that usually impede fruitful dialogue about the racial and economic divide in our country **(80)**?
- The Holy Father, Pope Francis, teaches us that treating our sisters and brothers as objects is a form of slavery **(81)**. What does this mean to you?
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenges us to reject "cheap grace" and embrace the "cost" of true discipleship **(82)**. What "costs" would you personally have to pay if you wanted to make crossing the racial divide an integral part of your daily life **(82)**?
- The first four suggestions in the Letter's conclusion all focus on prayer and spirituality **(83,** 1-4**)**. This emphasis implies that religious renewal and genuine personal spiritual conversion are essential for crossing the racial divide. How do you plan to follow this mandate?
- The Bishop provides fourteen specific suggestions for going forward and invites you to develop your own. Which suggestions would be best for your group (or for individuals in your group) to use as a means of going forward and making a difference?

Think and Act

- Do the ideas in Part VI and your conversation prompt you to consider doing or saying anything differently in your personal life, your family, your parish, your place of work, or the larger community?

Sending Forth

The leader of the session invites the community to close with prayer. After a brief pause, everyone is invited to offer prayers for the needs of those gathered, the needs of the Church, and for the grace to build bridges across the racial divide. The prayer may conclude with the Our Father and the sharing of the Peace of Christ.

VI. Conclusion: Pray, Listen, Learn, Think, and Act

(79) In this New Year's Day Reflection on Peace, I have deliberately placed the headline grabbing events just across the Mississippi River in Ferguson, Missouri and in cities around the United States in the larger context of the racial divide in our country and in our Church. I have invited you to enter into dialogue and prayer about complex and difficult issues without passing premature judgment on those with whom you might disagree. Many of you may well already be actively engaged in this much-needed dialogue and prayer. If you are, I encourage you to continue and to expand and deepen your conversations.

(80) You are surely aware that there is usually a degree of tension in conversations concerning the racial divide. In schools, at places of work, in restaurants, in bars, and in homes, people are talking. If they are not, then there may be a deafening silence when the topic of racial differences is raised. The tone of these conversations is usually influenced by the age and the cultural, economic, educational and racial backgrounds of the participants. Because people have such different experiences and vantage points, some may have withdrawn from the conversation believing that reconciling different world views is all but impossible. It may be best not to try and avoid pain and conflict. Many people, Black and White, believe that since the issue of race is so volatile, it is best not to think about it, talk about it, or even hear about it. They simply strive to do the best they can to be fair and just in the world immediately around them without getting involved with the larger conversation.

(81) In his message for this World Day of Peace, His Holiness, Pope Francis reminds us that in today's world, slavery comes about when we treat our fellow human beings not as persons but as objects. Then our brothers and sisters are no longer considered of equal dignity to ourselves, sharing our common humanity. They are simply the means to an end. Concerning contemporary causes of human enslavement, the Pontiff says, "I think in the first place of poverty, underdevelopment and exclusion, especially when combined with a lack of access to education or scarce, even non-existent, employment opportunities." These concerns of the Pope speak directly to the impact of the great divide discussed in this Reflection.

(82) We know that it is almost impossible for a family, a parish, or even a diocese to transform nationwide social structures that reinforce the racial divide. The place for us to begin is with ourselves, praying that the Holy Spirit will open our hearts to live by the words of St. Paul to the Thessalonians (5, 18-19). "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran Pastor and Theologian, murdered by the Nazis for his opposition to Adolph Hitler's slaughter of the Jewish people, reminded us that the "cost" of true discipleship of Jesus Christ requires us to reject the "cheap grace" we think we can obtain by going through religious rituals in which our hearts and souls are not involved. God's redeeming grace requires our obedience to His law of love and our concrete actions on behalf of others.

(83) Therefore, I will conclude this Reflection with suggestions for your consideration. Pray, Listen, Learn, Think, and Act.

1. Go to Mass and Communion at least one weekday a week and pray specifically for guidance concerning ways in which you can bridge the racial divide.

2. Read the Sacred Scriptures regularly focusing on the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul. Meditate on passages that remind you that in Christ, God reveals His love for every human being.

3. Pray the Rosary once a week with your family on the same day at the same time for the intention of the end to racial conflict and prejudice in the United States. Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit within you and the voices of others around you.

4. Examine your conscience at least once a month acknowledging any acts or omissions (thoughts, words, or deeds) that reinforce the racial divide. Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

5. Participate in serious discussions about this World Day of Peace 2015 Reflection with your parish staff. Place the document on your parish website. Urge the Chancery staff, school faculty, and small groups of parishioners to discuss it before, during, or after Lent.

6. Take up Brothers and Sisters to Us (1979) and What We Have Seen and Heard (1984). Study these key documents and learn about important examples in the Church's teaching on the racial divide in America. There are valuable, unheeded suggestions in each letter that are relevant for today. Examine the expression, "White privilege." What does it mean to you? Does consideration of this idea diminish or increase the racial divide?

7. Contact St. Augustine of Hippo Parish and Sister Thea Bowman Catholic School in East St. Louis. Learn about the ministry of the Church in the African-American community. Create opportunities for your parishioners to visit these communities. Make new friends.

8. Initiate an effort to get to know the police officers who serve your communities. Thank them for their important service. Help the young people in the community to appreciate the role of the police, to get to know and respect them. Help the police to get to know and respect the young people.

9. Work to establish or improve constructive, worthwhile activities for teenagers in your community. Is your parish doing all it can in this area?

10. Become involved with any community activities that support and strengthen families. Direct your children to proper role-models who will help them lead mature, responsible, Christ-centered lives.

11. If you live near or work with individuals whose racial background is different from your own with whom you have never discussed the issues raised by this Reflection, break the ice, start the conversation.

12. Take note of the way in which the racial divide has been portrayed in films old and new. A viewing of such recent influential motion pictures as Tate Taylor's "The Help," "Lee Daniels' The Butler," Steven Spielberg's "Lincoln," and Ava DuVernay's "Selma" could prompt fruitful discussions, especially with people of diverse backgrounds.

13. This year is the 75th anniversary of David O. Selznick's 1939 film of Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With The Wind," the Academy Award winning epitome of old Hollywood moviemaking, with Hattie McDaniel's exceptional Oscar-winning performance as the house "slave," "Mammy" in a completely romanticized presentation of what the evil of slavery was actually like.

Steve McQueen's 2013 Oscar-winning film of Solomon Northup's 1853 slave narrative, "Twelve Years a Slave" recounts the true story of a New York State-born free African-American man who was kidnapped in Washington, D.C. in 1841 and "sold" into slavery. Chiwetel Ejiofor's exceptional Oscar-nominated performance as Mr. Northup provides a far more realistic account of human bondage than "Gone With The Wind." A discussion comparing these films would almost certainly shed light on the contemporary experience of the racial divide.

14. You, your parishioners, your friends and neighbors may well have far better and more relevant ideas than these suggestions. Obviously, you should make use of them. These suggestions are simply to stimulate your conversations. If you think that I, as your Bishop and as one who lives in the midst of the divide, can contribute to your conversations, I will gladly join you.

(84) Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. What I have written here is incomplete and imperfect. You may very well have agreed with one point and then completely disagreed with another. This is to be expected. These reflections are not in any sense definitive. The primary objective has been to assist you in thinking, talking, and praying about how Americans of different racial backgrounds relate to one another at this critical juncture. A number of people directly involved in the conflicts that have caused us all to stop and think have given voice to hope that we are living through a seminal moment that has the power to transform our nation. Do you share that hope? Are there things you can do, as a faithful Christian, that can bridge the different experiences and attitudes that cause the racial divide?

(85) New Year's Day is often associated with resolutions. We look back on the past year and give thanks to God for the progress we have made in our Christian life during our journey around the sun. We look ahead to the New Year, another journey around the sun, and pray for the grace we need to make even more progress in our life in Christ in the year ahead. On Christmas Day, we commemorated the coming of Christ in long ago history. Now we must resolve to do whatever we can in the year ahead to prepare a place for the Lord Jesus Christ to be born in the cold stable of our hearts and our world, since there is still no room in the inn.

(86) That saving birth confronts and comforts each of us with the life-giving, sin-shattering truth. Before God there is no racial divide because the life, teachings, wondrous signs, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and His Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit has redeemed us all.

Praise be Jesus Christ.
Both now and forever. Amen!

+Edward K. Braxton

****

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D., Bishop of Belleville, Illinois
can be reached through his Administrative Assistant at the Chancery of the Diocese of Belleville:
Mrs. Judy I. Hoffmann at (618) 722-5003 or e-mail: jhoffmann@diobelle.org.

Reprint Permission
Copyright © + Edward K. Braxton, Diocese of Belleville. This text may be duplicated and distributed as a pastoral resource. However, it should not be sold or duplicated for profit. The illustrations used throughout are from *Religious Clip Art for the Liturgical Year* by Steve Erspamer, SM, collections of reproducible liturgical art published by LTP. "Angel of Harmony" by Liz Quirin. *All graphics used with permission.*

FURTHER READING

His Holiness, Pope Francis, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2015, "No Longer Slaves, But Brothers and Sisters." Vatican website: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html

"Brothers and Sisters to Us," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Pastoral Letter on Racism, 1979. Available at usccb.org: http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/brothers-and-sisters-to-us.cfm.

"What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1984. Available at usccb.org: http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/brothers-and-sisters-to-us.cfm.

"Evangelization: Crossing the Cultural Divide," Bishop Edward K. Braxton, *Origins*, October 2, 1997, Vol. 27: No. 16

"Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race," Matthew Frye Jacobson, Harvard University Press, 1999.

"How the Irish Became White," Noel Ignatiev, Routledge Publishing, 1995.

"The Help," Kathryn Stockett, Penguin Books, 2009.

"Twelve Years a Slave" Solomon Northup, Derby & Miller, 1853.

FILMS

"The Help," directed by Tate Taylor, 2011.

"Lee Daniels' The Butler," directed by Lee Daniels, 2013.

"Lincoln," directed by Steven Spielberg, 2012.

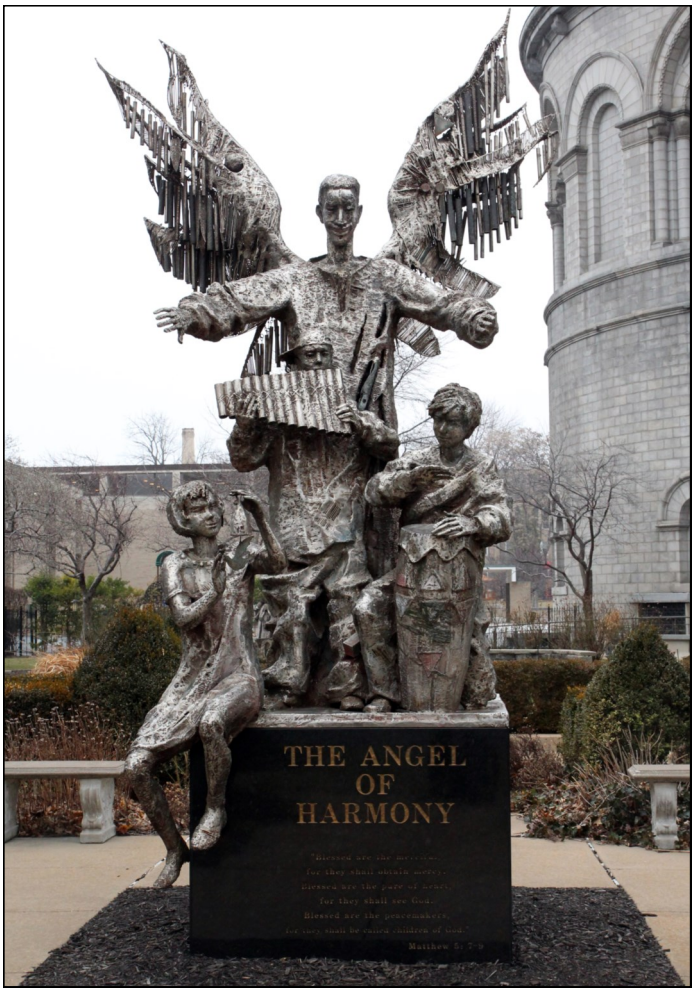
"Selma," directed by Ava DuVernay, 2014.

"Twelve Years a Slave," directed by Steve McQueen, 2013.

"Fruitvale Station," directed by Ryan Coogler, 2013.

"Black or White," directed by Mike Binder, 2015.

Love is the only force powerful enough to turn an enemy into a friend.
— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



The "Angel of Harmony," which stands in front of the Cathedral Basilica of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, is the work of sculptor, Wiktor Szostalo. It is fashioned from welded stainless steel with musical wind chime wings. Bishop Braxton, who served as Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis, contributed to the design which features children of different races protected by the outstretched arms of an angel whose features are those of the Bishop's late brother, Cullen Lawrence Braxton, Jr.

DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE